

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of providing a customer with updated wait time messages during a call to a call center, comprising the steps of:
 - 5 receiving an incoming customer call;
 - at any time during the call, determining whether resources of the call center are available to further process the call;
 - if resources are available, continuing to process 10 the call;
 - if resources are not available, placing the customer on hold;
 - calculating an expected wait time;
 - playing an initial voice message informing the 15 customer of the expected wait time, the reason for the wait, and the operation of a wait time audio indicator that will indicate the progress of the wait time;
 - playing the wait time audio indicator;
 - during the wait time, recalculating, at least once, 20 the remaining expected wait time; and
 - during the wait time, providing the customer with at least one update voice message that informs the customer of the remaining expected wait time, using the results of the recalculating step.

2. A method of providing a customer with updated wait time messages during a call to a call center, comprising the steps of:

- receiving an incoming customer call;
- 5 at any time during the call, determining whether resources of the call center are available to further process the call;
- if resources are available, continuing to process the call;
- 10 if resources are not available, placing the customer on hold;
- calculating an expected wait time; and
- playing a wait time audio indicator that indicates the progress of the expected wait time.

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- 3. The method of Claim 2, further comprising the steps of, during the wait time, recalculating, at least once, the remaining expected wait time, and of providing the customer with at least one voice update message that informs the customer of the remaining expected wait time.

4. The method of Claim 3, wherein the providing step is repeated when the customer advances in a queue.

25 5. The method of Claim 3, wherein the voice update message is provided when a customer advances in a queue.

6. The method of Claim 3, wherein the voice update message is provided at periodic intervals during the hold.

7. The method of Claim 2, wherein the wait time audio indicator is an audio signal that changes in pitch during the progress of the wait.

5 8. The method of Claim 2, wherein the wait time audio indicator is an audio signal that changes in tone during the progress of the wait.

10 9. The method of Claim 2, wherein the wait time audio indicator is an audio signal that changes in amplitude during the progress of the wait.

15 10. The method of Claim 2, wherein the placing step is in response to a routing queue, and wherein the calculating step is performed by multiplying a queue length times an average wait time.

20 11. The method of Claim 2, further comprising the step of playing an initial voice message informing the customer of the expected wait time.

12. The method of Claim 11, wherein the initial voice message apprises the customer of the operation of an audio wait time indicator.

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13. The method of Claim 2, wherein the audio wait time indicator is continuous during the wait time.

14. The method of Claim 2, further comprising the step of recalculating the expected wait time and modifying the audio wait time indicator in response to the recalculating step.

15. An automated call center for processing customer calls, comprising:

a call receiving unit for receiving telephonic input from a customer;

5 a DTMF receiver for decoding DTMF signals input by the customer;

a voice recognition unit for decoding voice customer input;

10 a call processing unit for processing the calls;

a queue manager for managing queues for resources of the system and for calculating expected wait time for customers on hold;

a message player for playing audio messages to the customer;

15 a wait message generator for generating voice wait time messages; and

a wait time audio generator for generating audio signals that notify a customer of the progress of the expected wait time while that customer is placed on hold.

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16. The system of Claim 15, wherein the queue manager is further operable to update expected wait times during customer holds.

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17. The system of Claim 15, wherein the wait time audio generator generates an audio signal that changes in pitch during the progress of the wait.

18. The system of Claim 15, wherein the wait time audio generator generates an audio signal that changes in tone during the progress of the wait.

5 19. The system of Claim 15, wherein the wait time audio generator generates an audio signal that changes in amplitude during the progress of the wait.